What is claimed is:

1. A method of parsing a message containing a plurality of data formats, the method comprising:

identifying the data format of a first component of the message;

responsive to said identification, selecting and invoking a first parser to parse the first component; and

identifying the data format of a second component of the message using said first selected parser and, responsive to said identification, using said first selected parser to select and invoke a second parser for parsing the second message component.

2. A method according to claim 1, wherein identifying the data format of the second component comprises reading a format field of the second component, and wherein selecting and invoking a second parser comprises comparing the identified format with a repository storing a list of parsers associated with specific formats and storing format templates corresponding to the specific formats, and providing the corresponding format template to the second parser.

3. A method according to claim 1, wherein invoking the second parser includes inputting the second component to the second parser, and the method further includes parsing the second component and then returning control to the first selected parser.

4. A method according to claim 1, wherein the first selected parser is adapted to parse a control structure of a message component having an IDoc format, to read a format field of a data segment of the IDoc component to identify the format, and to invoke a second parser which is defined for parsing IDoc data segments having the identified format.

5. A method according to claim 4, wherein the first selected parser passes the data segment to the second parser for parsing and then reads a format field of a next component of the message to determine which parser should parse the next component.

6. A message processing system including a set of selectable parsers, each selectable parser being adapted for analysing a respective set of message data formats and being selectable in response to identifying a message data format within the respective set, and a process for invoking a parser from the set, wherein at least one of said selectable parsers includes:

means for parsing a first component of a message having a message data format within the respective set;

means for identifying the data format of a second component of the message; and

means, responsive to said identification, for selecting another one of said set of parsers and for invoking the selected parser to parse the second message component.

7. A message processing system according to claim 6, including a repository of message format templates, each template representing the field structure of a particular format of message component, wherein said at least one parser is adapted to parse the first component to enable identification of a format field containing information relating to the format of the second component and to read the format information to identify the data format, and wherein invoking the selected parser to parse the second component includes providing to the selected parser an identification of the message format template corresponding to the identified format.

8. A message processing system according to claim 6, including a repository of message format templates, each template representing the field structure of a particular format of message component, wherein said at least one parser is adapted to parse the first component and then to read a format field of a second component of the message to identify the data format of the second component, and wherein invoking the selected parser to parse the second component includes providing to the selected parser an identification of the message format template corresponding to the identified format.

9. A data processing apparatus for processing a bit stream which may contain a plurality of data formats, the apparatus including a set of selectable parsers, each adapted for analysing a specific set of one or more data

formats, wherein a plurality of said set of parsers each include:

means for parsing a first component of a bit stream,

means for identifying the data format of a second component of the bit stream, and

means, responsive to said identification, for selecting another one of said set of parsers and for invoking the selected parser to parse the second component.

10. A data processing apparatus according to claim 9, wherein the selected parser is adapted to access a format template from a format dictionary corresponding to the format indication.

11. A data processing apparatus according to claim 9, wherein the means for parsing the first component is adapted to output a name-value pair indicating the format of the second component.

12. A data processing apparatus according to claim 9, wherein the means for identifying the data format comprises means for analysing a format field of the second component.